

NEWS AND NOTES FOR FLORIDA VETERANS

Veterans Service Center, VA Regional Office
St. Petersburg, FL

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The "News and Notes for Florida Veterans" is published monthly by the Veterans Service Center, VA Regional Office, St. Petersburg, Florida, to provide information on VA benefit programs to veterans and dependents in Florida. The material presented does not have the effect of laws or regulations. Please send questions or comments on this newsletter to Veterans Service Center, ATTN: "News and Notes," PO Box 1437, St. Petersburg, FL 33731. We do not have the resources to maintain a mailing list for distribution to individuals; however this newsletter is available on the St. Petersburg VA Regional Office web site at www.vba.va.gov/ro/south/spete.

THE ST PETERSBURG COMMUNITY-BASED OUTPATIENT CLINIC was opened on January 19th at 840 Dr. Martin Luther King Street North, St. Petersburg, telephone (727) 502-1700. The hours are Monday - Friday 7:30 AM to 4:00 PM. The Clinic features primary care services for veterans in the St Petersburg area, including primary care - health promotion, disease prevention; diagnosis and treatment of acute and chronic medical conditions; referral to specialty care; EKG service; phlebotomy service; mental health services; and pharmacy consultations. Routine prescriptions are processed through the mail or My HealthVet (<http://www.myhealth.va.gov/>). The Clinic is handicapped accessible with full and easy access for all veterans.

\$53 MILLION FOR CAPE CORAL, FLORIDA, FACILITY ANNOUNCED (VA News Release) WASHINGTON – The contract from the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) awards more than \$53.1 million to Kraft Construction Company Inc. of Naples to construct a 220,000-square-foot building. The multi-story structure will provide a surgery and outpatient support center to meet increased demand for diagnostic procedures, ambulatory surgery and specialty care. The new building will replace a Fort Myers facility and expand diagnostic and treatment capacity for southwest Florida's veterans. The contractor has two years to complete the work.

VA TO BEGIN RECOVERY OF POST-9/11 GI BILL ADVANCE PAYMENTS (VA News Release) WASHINGTON –The Department of Veterans Affairs is beginning the process of recovering advance payments made available during the fall 2009 semester to veterans and servicemembers who applied for education benefits. VA will begin sending out notification letters explaining the repayment process.

In October VA instituted an advanced payment process for all eligible students who were currently enrolled in an institution of higher learning for the fall 2009 term to ensure that all veterans and eligible students were able to focus on their academic studies and not be burdened with financial concerns. As part of that process, a web portal

was established to allow electronic submission for advance payment. Advance payments were also made on-site at VA offices around the country. At that time student veterans were told that advance payments would be deducted from future benefit payments.

In collaboration with the Department of Defense, VA will notify active duty service members who may have mistakenly applied for the advance payment of their options for returning un-cashed checks or reimbursing deposited funds.

VA discontinued advance payments via the website portal following the end of the fall 2009 semester. VA is currently processing approximately 7,000 education benefits daily. As of January 22 the Department has processed more than 105,000 of the approximately 132,000 spring enrollments received. Since the inception of the historic new program last year, VA has paid out more than \$1.3 billion in education benefits to more than 183,000 veteran students.

INFORMATION ON VIETNAM NAVAL OPERATIONS VA has initiated a program to collect data on Vietnam naval operations for the purpose of providing information to assist with development in disability claims based on herbicide exposure from Navy veterans. Verification has been received from various sources showing that a number of offshore "blue water" naval vessels conducted operations on the inland "brown water" rivers and delta areas of Vietnam. Also certain vessel types that operated primarily or exclusively on the inland waterways have been identified.

The ships and dates of inland waterway service are listed below. If a veteran's service aboard one of these ships can be confirmed through military records during the time frames specified, then exposure to herbicide agents can be presumed without further development.

All vessels of Inshore Fire Support [IFS] Division 93 during their entire Vietnam tour: *USS Carronade (IFS 1)*; *USS Clarion River (LSMR 409)* [Landing Ship, Medium, Rocket]; *USS Francis River (LSMR 525)*; *USS White River (LSMR 536)*.

All vessels with the designation LST [Landing Ship, Tank] during their entire tour [WWII ships converted to transport supplies on rivers and serve as barracks for brown water Mobile Riverine Forces].

All vessels with the designation LCVF [Landing Craft, Vehicle, Personnel] during their entire tour.

All vessels with the designation PCF [Patrol Craft, Fast] during their entire tour [Also called "Swift Boats," operating for enemy interdiction on close coastal waters].

All vessels with the designation PBR [Patrol Boat, River] during their entire tour [Also called River Patrol Boats as part of the Mobile Riverine Forces operating on inland waterways and featured in the Vietnam film "Apocalypse Now."]

USS Ingersoll (DD-652) [Destroyer] [Operated on Saigon River, October 24-25, 1965]

USS Mansfield (DD-728) [Destroyer] [Operated on Saigon River August 8-19, 1967 and December 21-24, 1968]

USS Richard E. Kraus (DD-849) [Destroyer] [Operated on coastal inlet north of Da Nang, June 2-5, 1966, protecting Marines holding a bridge]

USS Basilone (DD-824) [Destroyer] [Operated on Saigon River, May 24-25, 1966]

USS Hamner (DD-718) [Destroyer] [Operated on Song Lon Tao and Long Song Tao Rivers, August 15-September 1, 1966]

USS Conway (DD-507) [Destroyer] [Operated on Saigon River, early August 1966]

USS Fiske (DD-842) [Destroyer] [Operated on Mekong River, June 16-21, 1966]

USS Black (DD-666) [Destroyer] [Operated on Saigon River, July 13-19, 1966]

USS Providence (CLG-6) [Cruiser, Light, Guided Missile] [Operated on Saigon River 3 days during January 1964]

USS Mahan (DLG-11) [Guided Missile Frigate] [Operated on Saigon River October 24-28, 1964]

USS Okanogan (APA-220) [Attack Transport] [Operated on Saigon River July 22-23, 29-30, 1968 and August 5-6, 1968]

USS Niagara Falls (AFS-3) [Combat Stores Ship] [Unloaded supplies on Saigon River and Cam Rahn Bay, April 22-25, 1968]

For information on Agent Orange - herbicide exposure and Vietnam veterans see
<http://www.vba.va.gov/bln/21/benefits/herbicide/>

VA FACILITIES ADDRESSES AND TELEPHONE NUMBERS:

SUICIDE PREVENTION 1-800-273-8255

VA Regional Office, St. Petersburg - PO Box 1437, St. Petersburg, FL 33731 1-800-827-1000

Regional Processing Office, Atlanta, GA (education claims) - PO Box 100022, Decatur, GA 30031-7022 1-888-GIBILL1 (442-4551)
Telephone number for Chapter 30 self-verifications 1-877-823-2378

VA EFT Information Hotline (electronic funds transfer - direct deposit) 1-877-838-2778

Veterans Health Administration Toll-Free Hotline (medical care) - 1-877-222-8387

VA Health Revenue Service (information on amounts owed to VA Medical Centers) 1-866-793-4591

VA Insurance Center, Philadelphia (VA Insurance) - PO Box 42954, Philadelphia, PA 19101 1-800-669-8477

VA Health Administration Center (CHAMPVA and Spina Bifida health care) -
CHAMPVA inquiries: PO Box 65023, Denver, CO 80206-5023
CHAMPVA claims: PO Box 65024, Denver, CO 80206-5024
Spina Bifida inquiries and claims: PO Box 65025, Denver, CO 80206-5025 1-800-733-8387

National Cemeteries

10,000 Bay Pines Blvd N, Bay Pines FL 727-398-9426
6502 SW 102nd Ave, Bushnell FL 352-793-7740
6501 S State Rd 7, Lake Worth, FL 561-649-6489
4083 Lannie Rd, Jacksonville FL 904-766-5222
Naval Air Station, Pensacola FL 850-453-4108/4846
9810 State Hwy 72, Sarasota FL 877-861-9840
104 Marine St, St Augustine FL 352-793-7740

National Cemetery Administration Office of Memorial Programs (headstones and markers) - 5109 Russell Rd Quantico VA 22134-3903 1-800-697-6947

Loan Guaranty Eligibility Center (certificates of eligibility) PO Box 20729, Winston-Salem, NC 27120 1-888-244-6711

Telecommunications Device for the Deaf (TDD) Unit - Chicago VA Regional Office 1-800-829-4833

INTERNET SITES OF INTEREST:

VA Web Site: www.va.gov

VA Web Automated Reference Materials System (WARMS) www.warms.vba.va.gov

St. Petersburg VA Regional Office:
www.vba.va.gov/ro/south/spete

Property Management (sale of VA-repossessed homes): <http://va.reotrans.com/>

Federal employment: www.usajobs.opm.gov

Florida Dept of Veterans Affairs: www.floridavets.org

"Florida Vets First:" www.FloridaVetsFirst.com

Library of Congress (information on pending legislation) thomas.loc.gov